THE
CATHOLIC RADICAL

"...to foster a society based on creed instead of greed." Peter Maurin

December/January 2014-15 ***Price: For whatever it's worth.***

Mideast Travels

by Claire Schaeffer-Duffy

Editor's Note: The recipient of an Eileen Egan Journalism Fellowship, Claire traveled with three other reporters to Jordan and Lebanon (October 24-November 2) to observe the work of Catholic Relief Services. The following are excerpts from her journal.

October 24. Baltimore. Our day-long orientation at Catholic Relief Services begins with an update from Sean Callahan, the agency's chief operations officer, who has just returned from the Middle East. He describes Jordan as an oasis of relative calm, Lebanon as more volatile, and Syria as awash in men with guns. An observer told him there are 4,000 armed groups in the country. Many are neighborhood vigilante gangs or family protection committees created in response to the absence of governing authority. So when the US speaks of arming rebels in Syria, Callahan wonders which ones? In Iraq, he tells us, the Christians are saying, "You guys, [Americans] really messed up." Brutal as it was, the Hussein regime provided space for Iraq's minorities. Whereas Christians in Syria hope for rapprochement with whatever government emerges, in Iraq, they want to quit the country altogether. Quoting an Israeli, Callahan says, "The map of the Middle East has already changed."

photo of Iraqi refugees by Siraj Davis

October 26/27: Jordan. We arrive in Amman late afternoon, a forgiving time when the white desert sun softens to rose and shadows stretch across the land. The drive into the capital takes us past open country, scattered, here and there, with flat-roofed houses. We pass an Akea outlet, a Monsanto operation, behind which grows a small field of corn (here in the desert!), and olive groves. Our driver Ahmad tells me Jordanians wait for the first autumn rain before gathering the fruit. These fell two weeks ago, so now you see olives heaped in mounds between rows of ancient, gnarled trees.

On Monday, we learn about the efforts of Caritas Jordan, CRS's in-country partner, to assist Syrian refugees. More than a million have reportedly entered the country since the Syrian conflict erupted three years ago. Amid the influx, Caritas expanded its team of staff and volunteers from 30 to 200.

We visit a pre-school in the village of Ramtha, located less than ten miles from the Syrian border, and the Caritas Center in Zarqua, the country's largest northern city. Along with Lebanon, Jordan is not a signator to the UN Convention on Refugees. The new arrivals, who are here as temporary guests, are not permitted to work (some do illegally) and depend on UNHCR and agencies like Caritas. The UN has received only 40% of its funding this year for refugee assistance. The Syrians are worried their food coupons, provided by the World Food Program, will be cut.

Jordan is clearly stressed from the surge of newcomers. Their presence has elevated the cost of living for everyone.

(Continued on Page 2)

Forgiveness

by Jim Consedine

Editor's Note: The author is a Catholic Worker in Christchurch, New Zealand, a prison chaplain, and author of ***Restorative Justice: healing the effects of crime.***

Forgiveness is arguably the hardest of all virtues to practise. Yet that is what Jesus asks of us in a recent Sunday gospel, Matthew 18/21-35. He quotes a lengthy parable. It was about the servant who was forgiven himself but couldn't forgive another and was condemned. Seventy-seven times seven. It seems an impossible task. And the Gospel leaves us no process to follow, presuming we will work that out for ourselves.

In terms of process, I think there are five steps we may consider: 1. Decide to forgive. Nothing happens without an initial decision; 2. Forgiveness needs to be repeated frequently. It doesn't always happen immediately, especially if the hurt is huge; 3. It is helpful to attempt to see why the hurt occurred. Try "walking a kilometre in the other person's shoes," seeing why they did what they did and trying to understand from their perspective. The results can be surprising; 4. We need to recognise ourselves to be the main beneficiary of forgiveness. If we forgive, our anger, bitterness and guilt are relieved. We are freed. The one who is forgiven may (or may not) ever know of our action; 5. Repeated prayer is the key to enabling forgiveness to happen. This is because it is a movement of the heart (and often defies logic: for example, "the person doesn't deserve forgiveness"). Just do it. This will guarantee forgiveness occurs. Remember, the process can take time.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote a famous book called **No Future Without Forgiveness**. He was right. Ω

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Travels

(Continued from Page 1)

Almost half the citizenry—6.5 million people—are Palestinians, refugees from previous conflicts. Additionally, migrants, guest workers, and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, fleeing the wars of 1990 and 2003, are trying to survive here. An aid worker tells me Jordan has closed its northern border where most Syrians were entering by car or foot. The hospitality shown the new arrivals is remarkable nonetheless, the tolerance of ordinary Jordanians a marked contrast to US hostility toward the unaccompanied minors crossing our southwestern borders. Caritas, a Catholic organization, is assisting people who are almost exclusively Muslim, providing an impressive array of educational, medical, and psychosocial support. The Syrians speak with such gratitude for the kindness of their Christian benefactors. "Even the director of Caritas called me brother," a Syrian refugee from Homs tells me.

When we ask about the Muslim/Christian divide—the lens we are given in the West—everyone says the fighting has nothing to do with religion. Jordanian Muslims despise ISIL, says a young shopkeeper. A Christian, she introduces me to a Syrian refugee, a father of three, who is eking out a living selling coffee just outside her shop. His take on ISIL: They are killing everyone, even Muslims.

A royal feast tonight at Shufra, a restaurant on Rainbow Street that was once an old Arab house. You enter via an arched stone portal laced with bougainvilleas now in full bloom. Large clay pots line the roof and inside the smell of mint, night jasmine, and coffee steeped in cardamom.

October 28: A dozen or so Iraqis are waiting for us in the courtyard of Our Lady of the Assumption Armenian Catholic Church — old men with olive-green eyes, young boys in baseball caps. An elderly mustached gentleman fingers a set of brightly-colored rosary beads while children flutter about.

Five thousand Iraqi refugees have streamed into Amman since last summer.

They continue to come daily on planes from the Kurdish city of Erbil. Caritas Jordan is the lead organization coordinating care of the new arrivals, who are harbored in churches and a few apartments. According to Dana, a communications officer for Caritas, the Jordanian government initially granted only 1,000 visas for the Iraqis, but increased the number when it saw there was an organization willing to care for them.

The church hall is cordoned off into ten or so makeshift rooms made of wooden partitions and blankets strung across ropes. Families of six to eight people inhabit an area no more than 10x20 feet. We meander through, madly clicking away at our cameras, and then ask people to tell us their stories. Unlike the Syrian refugees we visited yesterday, many of the Iraqis speak English fairly well so we are not dependent on translators.

It feels cruel to gawk at people in their misery, to take photos, ask questions, scribble down all the sad details, and then after a few minutes of awkward silence leave them with a handshake and *Rabna makoon*, "God be with you," an Arabic phrase I have learned. And yet, this is what reporters do.

Raed, a 48-year-old English teacher and father of four, tells me how he and his family left the city of Karakosh in June during the time of his children's final exams. To keep the kids focused on their studies, he closed the curtains of his house, and ran the generator, hoping its hum would drown out the sound of the bombardment outside. But you cannot lock out fear. After a newly engaged woman and two children were killed, Raed's family, along with many others in the city, fled. He says some of the residents who sided with DASH, as they call the Islamic State militants here, were former students of his. He smiles often, an endearing gap-toothed smile, but his eyes show pain and bewilderment. Like so many of the refugees we meet, he seems to be in a state of shock.

I move through the interviews slothfully, with half attention. Maybe it is sleep deprivation or my familiarity with this sad tale that dulls my empathy. I heard almost identical accounts from internally displaced peoples in post-war Bosnia: families leaving their homes with only the clothes they are wearing; going first to a nearby village expecting to return when everything quieted down, and then fleeing the area completely.

We are observing so much, so fast here, feelings cannot always correspond with experience. They emerge when I recall scenes from the churches we visit— the Iraqi surgeon pacing in the courtyard of the Armenian Catholic Church. A

distinguished looking man, he wore a collared shirt beneath a v-neck sweater. I found this attention to appearance, despite his circumstances, very moving. Yesterday, an energetic, pretty refugee told me she was an English teacher in Syria, her husband a pharmacist. She said this proudly, as if, she wanted me to know her life had not always been so desperate.

The surgeon appeared to be waiting for God, someone, to take him and his family away from their current situation. "where do you want to go?" I ask. His daughter, who listened shyly as her father described the family's wretched exodus from their new home in the Iraqi village of Bardella, immediately replied, "Australia!"

Muslims are assisting in the care for these Iraqi Christians. The staff at Caritas Jordan, a Catholic organization, includes Muslims, and the priest at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart says Muslim community groups have brought food and blankets for his new guests. One of many details here that undermines the Muslims-are-persecuting-Christians narratives.

October 29: Petra! Ahmad comes early to drive our entourage to the ancient rose city built by the Nabataeans in the second century BC. I planned to catch up on sleep during the long car ride but the arid landscape along King's Highway is too eventful. We are in "Lawrence of Arabia" country, moving through terrain of an even more distant past. We pass the famous railway from the film and beyond it, a Crusaders fort and 700-year-old pistachio trees A guidebook on Biblical Jordan reminds me this is the country where Jacob wrestled with an Angel, Elijah ascended into Heaven, and Jesus was baptized and began His public ministry. I am trying to take it all in. Impossible.

October 30: Lebanon. "Beirut live. Catch the icon," reads a billboard at the Hariri International Airport. A security official, a slim, balding man, examines our letter from the CRS office in Lebanon, questions two in our party, and ultimately waves all of us through. After our time in the Jordanian desert, the humidity of Mediterranean Beirut is immediately noticeable. Overhead, enormous, spectacular clouds.

I'm so sleep-deprived, I feel punch drunk and have to fight the urge to giggle at Davide Bernocchi, the country representative for CRS in Lebanon and a gesticulating Italian. He whisks us through a succession of meetings that includes a short, moving visit with Father Salim Daccache S.J., the first Lebanese rector of the University of St. Joseph, a Jesuit institution.

Syrian refugees, Claire Schaeffer-Duffy photo

The university straddles the notorious Green Line that divided Beirut during the country's 15-year civil war. While the fighting raged all around, St. Joseph's stayed open. Several Jesuits were killed. As Christians, we have to offer "a spirituality of involvement, friendship, proximity," Father Salim says. For him, this includes providing humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees. Reportedly 1.8 million have come into Lebanon, a small country of four million people. Some fear jihadis, or their sympathizers, are among the refugees.

But this fear is not apparent in Father Salim. Paraphrasing the comments of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, he says Christians in the Middle East need, "to struggle to protect with the word, and not the sword, to convince, to say something. But if the time comes to be a real witness and we have to offer our lives, then so be it. Many Christians in Iraq have already done so." I want to linger in this beautiful office so full of light from windows that reach from floor to ceiling. In the corner, a flowerpot explodes with the biggest, white orchids I have ever seen.

Our security briefing that evening begins with the origins of the Catholic and Orthodox churches and goes on from there. Davide explains how religious identity in Lebanon determines social and political affiliation. He maps out the political groups operating in the country and briefly explains the government's arrangement in power-sharing. Even if I were well-rested, I could not keep up. Lebanon is a land of layered allegiances. Davide is brilliant.

October 31: A day of meetings in which we get lots of background on Christian/Muslim relations and the Syrian refugee crisis in the Lebanese context. We meet with members of Adyan, a multi-faith organization co-founded by two academics, a Maronite priest and a Sunni woman. Adyan's focus is inter-faith dialogue, education in peacebuilding, and inter-cultural citizenship. On the office wall is photo of Dorothy Day among a collection of international peacemakers. Here too, I learn about the Syrian Gandhi, Jawdat Said, whose story I want to research.

"Maybe the thing the Arab Spring was missing is dialogue," says Adyan co-founder Rev. Fadi Daou. "With the Arab Spring diversity has come to the surface. In Lebanon it was always there, but not in the Arab states." He shows a chart depicting the variants of Islam that is as elaborate as Davide's diagram of Christian sects presented to us last night.

Davide tells us the four most important women in Islam are: the Virgin Mary, Pharoah's wife, who rescued Moses, the prophet's wife Hadija, and his daughter Fatima. At the statue of Our Lady in Harissa, I see women in hijab climbing the steps to her pedestal as well as a Catholic priest.

November 1: Heavy rain and music on our last day. "The Girl from Ipanema" floats off the car radio as we wind our way up the mountain for Mass at the Shrine of St. Charbel, Lebanon's national saint. In the choir loft, black-robed monks sing the liturgy in an unfamiliar scale, and on the ride down, Peter, one of the journalists, belts out a rousing rendition of the Irish ballad, "Willie McBride." The last sounds I hear as I take my leave of the country is the Muslim call to prayer, plaintive and ancient, rising up from the southern hills of Beirut. Ω

Tend My Sheep Ministry

by Andrea and John Thornton

Editor's Note: This article is excerpted from homilies the authors gave at churches in central Massachusetts. For more information, contact John or Andrea Thornton at: ajthorn@charter.net or (508) 949-3122, 868-5640, 868-5641.

It was early fall 2006. I was the music director at St. Philip's in Grafton. My husband and I felt called by a homily about a woman named Clara Hale from Harlem, New York, who at the age of 70 took in crack babies in her tiny apartment. "Mother Hale" received numerous awards and was cited by the president for her work with these children.

When I heard Clara's story, I heard God saying to me that if Mother Hale could care for that many children, with God's help I could care for at least one. So John and I contacted the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and became foster parents to infants.

It hasn't been easy, but it has been the most rewarding and fulfilling thing I have ever done in my life. God has entrusted us and blessed us with His little angels and that is a great gift, a miracle.

Why do we do this? Because God called us to this ministry and there is such a need. Infants and children are the most needy and defenseless of all God's creations. We just want to try and do what Jesus tells us to do.

Foster children, who are not returned to their families or adopted by 18, are no longer eligible for state services and often become homeless.

We believe children are the greatest gift God can send to this earth, and it is up to all of us to take care of them. If you want to see the face of God, look into the eyes of a new baby. It is the closest you will be to God on this earth.

In order to promote foster parenting, we started Tend My Sheep Ministry out of Sacred Heart Parish in Webster, Massachusetts. The inspiration for the name came from John 21:16 where Jesus asked, "**Simon, son of John, do you love me?**" and then instructed him, "**Tend my sheep**." Quite simply God's greatest gift, the children, are the sheep we are looking to tend.

In Massachusetts, 10,000 children need foster care, while there are only 2,500 foster families. Additionally, 2,400 children are available for adoption. Case workers are not supposed to manage more than 15 children, but all have higher case loads, some into the 30s. Our resource worker has 41. Cases are supposed to be settled within 18 months, but are currently being scheduled 23 months out. Consequently, 25,000 foster children a year, nation-wide, exceed the time limit for services without being returned to their home or being adopted.

WHY? Despite the DCF's commitment to permanency, safety, and well-being, as stated in the preamble of the Foster Child Bill of Rights, DCF's primary goal is reunification and giving the birth parents an opportunity to "get it together." They are given chance after chance.

Let me cite one example. Our first little boy came to us in May of 2012 at five days old. Roughly nine months later, at a review, the goal was recommended to be changed to adoption. During those first nine months, his mother repeatedly missed visits, was kicked out of a recovery house, failed to complete another recovery program, was arrested and incarcerated. Yet, at the hearing, the goal was still reunification, and that little "lamb" was returned to the mother in another residential recovery house. Four and a half months later, he was returned to us because she failed that program as well. He was placed in a prospective adoptive home in January 2014. The trial date so he can actually be adopted is April 2015. He will be three years old by then. His parents will have had, not 18 months, but almost three years to "get it together." This is typical for the children we have fostered.

What are we attempting to do in this ministry? Simply, to move the children through the system faster and reduce the child to foster parent ratio. To do this we need more foster parents and increased numbers of people to reach out to others, to write letters, and to offer prayers. We also need anyone who is willing to help this grass roots effort to grow to the point where the laws will change and the focus will be on the children — the sheep we are tending. Ω

The three kings

by Dorothee Sölle

I've thought a lot about why they went
a major disturbance in the sky
a threshold source of light
in an unexpected place
an unfamiliar star among familiar ones
is that reason enough to set out
on sand-drifted roads
carrying stale water in leather bags
month after month
putting aside for now the question of higher powers
that might have influenced them
I have no grasp of things like that
I would call
what drove them from home
where they must have had it good
I would call
this revolutionary virtue of the modern era
curiosity
this I'd guess is what spurred them on
they wanted to see what was up
to straighten out a new confusion
to account for this unexpected brightness
and incorporate it in the existing order

So they built a more powerful telescope
it didn't help
didn't clear anything up
the new light just glowed more brightly than ever
so they chartered
well-to-do as they were
a fair-sized caravan to run down the star
so they bargained bought organized laid in supplies
mapped out with thoroughness and foresight
their route and watering places
planned to travel at night
so they could promptly modify their plan
in accordance with the somewhat erratic
course of the star
so they went out
on their arduous way to explore
this mysterious disturbance
brought into the world
by light Ω

Happy Birthday, Frances!

Frances Crowe, a Quaker from Northampton, Massachusetts, recently turned 95. Despite her age, she is the most active, creative, hopeful, and lively person that any of us at Saints Francis and Thérèse Catholic Worker have ever had the good fortune to meet. We were blessed to join her in opposition to the first Gulf War with an act of nonviolent civil disobedience at Westover Air Force Base. During our week-long jury trial in Springfield, Massachusetts, the prosecutor tried to get Frances to admit that she could have joined a long-standing "legal" vigil outside the base instead of blocking the entrance. Under cross examination, he asked, "Mrs. Crowe, when was the first time you protested at Westover?" Frances thought for a second and replied, "1952." Not many activists can claim so many decades of faithful devotion to peacemaking.

Paul Shoul

Frances also joined us in another act of civil disobedience against the weaponry made by Raytheon Corporation in Andover, Massachusetts. Again, she was a star at trial and completely fearless of the possibility of being sent to jail.

And then, long after most people settle down and retire, Frances dramatically changed her already conscientious lifestyle to one that was more responsive to the environmental threat of global warming. She tries to eat only what is grown locally and walks to as many places as she possibly can. She was recently arrested for civil disobedience against nuclear power and worked to prevent a US escalation of war in Syria. When asked in a recent interview for *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, "How many times have you been arrested?" she replied, "Not enough." In the same interview, she reminded us all, "You *can* make a difference." She never stops responding to Tolstoy's question, "What then must I do?" with positive and personal action.

Frances Crowe is a gift to the human family, a tiny person in stature with an enormous impact and heart. Ω

"What I want to bring out is how a pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread out in all directions. And each one of our thoughts, words, and deeds is like that."

Dorothy Day

Mercy or Truth?

by Scott Schaeffer-Duffy

If you visit any number of conservative Catholic websites, you might think that the Pope Francis is a heretic intent on winning popularity at the expense of core Catholic values. Indeed, the pope has shown a more welcoming attitude toward gays, those who have had abortions, and those who are divorced and remarried. Although he has not changed any Church doctrine, conservatives believe that Francis' approach might be seen as a slippery slope towards abandoning traditional Catholic teaching.

The Boston Globe's editor for Global Catholicism, John Allen, reported that, at the end of the recent synod of bishops in Rome, Pope Francis tried to allay those fears by saying that the Church must neither "throw stones at sinners, the weak, and the ill," nor "come down off the cross" by accommodating Herself to "the spirit of the world." Francis quoted from a 1965 apostolic letter of Pope Paul VI which said, "By carefully surveying the signs of the times, we are making every effort to adapt ways and methods... to the growing needs of our time and the changing conditions of society." Francis went on to remind us, "God is not afraid of new things. This is why He is continually surprising us, opening our hearts, and guiding us in unexpected ways."

So, will the Church open communion to those formerly barred due to their sexual practices or marital status? And would such changes water down the Church's teaching?

The Catholic Catechism defines the Eucharist as "the Church's entire spiritual wealth, that is, Christ Himself, our Passover and '**living bread that came down from heaven**' (Jn 6:51)." The Catechism instructs us: "Anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of reconciliation before coming to communion," but then goes on to say that Mass "is wholly directed toward the intimate union of the faithful with Christ through communion."

In the Gospels, Jesus often shares intimate company with those who are publicly recognized sinners. He has a long conversation with a woman at a well who had many sexual partners, and he refuses to enforce the Mosaic law for a woman caught in adultery. It appears to me that Jesus put loving relationship ahead of judgment and saw that love as a basis for transformation.

But isn't giving communion to married gays or divorced and remarried Catholics blessing those in an unrepentant state of mortal sin? Conservatives harp on this, but don't seem bothered by the fact that active duty soldiers, executioners, and police officers, who can kill people as part of their professions, receive communion. In fact, many churches remember soldiers and police officers in special prayers. We do the same thing when we give communion to bankers given the Old and New Testament condemnations of accepting any interest on a loan. Theological gymnastics justifying war and usury notwithstanding, the contradiction remains.

Jesus with the woman at the well

Pope Francis reminds us that mercy, far from opposed to truth, is the best entree to it. Unless we want to re-establish a punitive Catholic state wherein heretics were burned, our best hope to sustain the Church is a welcoming attitude. Like Pope Francis, we must remember that "the joy of the Gospel fills the lives of all who encounter Jesus." Ω

To Be of Use

by Marge Piercy

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes
almost out of sight.

They seem to become natives
of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves,
an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo,
with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done,
again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who are not parlor generals
and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in
or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands,
crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn,
are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.

The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real. Ω

Letters

Anthony Russo

Dear Scott,
Raspberries are good this year. A lot of stained glass work, very busy. Bird migration is slow this year. The weather patterns are more different than usual, so the birds go a different way.

Always be positive, believe. It hasn't always been easy, but it seems to be now the more you do it.

Ken Paulson
Upton, Massachusetts

Dear Scott and Family,
I appreciate the Oct/Nov newsletter so much

"We Need Joy" is a great article and reminded me how often I wonder why there isn't more positive, healthy articles and news to view instead of the negative things that are so destructive. There should be more balance.

"Under the Bridge," by David Janicki, was very interesting. I like how he and Felix Cepeda just went forward [starting a Catholic Worker community in the Dominican Republic] with faith and honest effort, and how it all just works out.

Susan Schaller's article "Letting Tumult Cease" is superb. It's a perfect article on what our ailing planet needs so much... to absorb the violence, to overcome it with love, and she explains how to do such a difficult thing.

This morning I heard on National Public Radio that Australia was sending their asylees to Cambodia. That kind of shocked me. I think about the children from Central America coming here and being sent back to such a dangerous place and how bad it must be for them to travel such a journey. It's really too bad we can't offer more hospitality to the needful from everywhere; absorbing their pain, misery, their anger, and overcoming them with good, like Alison Quinn-Beitscher's article "Serving Refugees and Asylees."

Scott Perkins
Zephyrhills, Florida

Scott,
We have always been dismayed by the lack of good news, but it's out there. Here's a list my wife Nancy [Nowak] compiled for you:

www.DailyGood.org
www.KarmaTube @servicespace.org
www.goodnewsnetwork.org
www.upworthy.com (The Upworthiest)
www.KindSpring.org
www.lifebuzz.com

Phil Milgrom
Warren, Massachusetts

Dear Scott and Claire,
I just read your latest *Catholic Radical* and thought I should send a little joy your way! My favorite positive news source is *Yes* magazine....

I hope things are looking up. [To keep from feeling down], I turn to enjoying the simple beauties of nature, collecting fall leaves and making crayon leaf rubbing pictures (an activity I also do with the preschool children I teach), and doing yoga, focusing on the breath to feel calm and grounded and to be thankful for being alive and well.

Kathleen Reside
Pennington, New Jersey

Hi Scott & Claire,
I really appreciated the latest *Catholic Radical*. I found the contents really inspiring. Your article on Joy was particularly apt. I have been mid-wife to the purchase of 75 copies of Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, and sold them at cost or gifted them in our local parish and surrounds, and encouraged people to read it out loud to each other and mark it with a marker pen — that's how important I believe it is. I think it is the best document to come out of Rome in 40 years!

Jim Consedine
Christchurch, New Zealand

Catholic Worker Calendar

Wednesday, December 10 & January 7 & 21— Evening Prayer or Mass: Please join us in prayer and song. 7 P.M. 52 Mason Street. Refreshments to follow.

Sunday, December 21 — Christmas Caroling: Please join us as we bring good cheer to nursing home residents and our neighbors. Followed by mulled cider and Christmas cookies. Gather at 5:30 P.M. 52 Mason Street.

December 26 - 29 — We Need Help: Please volunteer to help out here at 52 Mason Street. Contact Scott (at 508 753-3588 or theresecw2@gmail.com) if you can cook a meal or house sit, even for an hour.

Wednesday, January 14 — Images of Jordan & Lebanon: Please join us for a slide presentation by Claire Schaeffer-Duffy about her trip to report on Catholic Relief Service's ministry to refugees from Iraq and Syria. 7 P.M 52 Mason Street.

Wednesday, January 29 — Poetry of Denise Levertov: Please come hear retired English professor Michael True read and comment on one of the most significant anti-war poets of late 20th century. 7 P.M 52 Mason Street.

Mason Street Musings

Our last "Musings" focused on joy, despite the fact that our summer was difficult. Since then, we would be hard-pressed not to emphasize gratitude. Numerous people volunteered to help around the house and with our baking during Claire's trip to Jordan and Lebanon. Readers entrusted us with record-setting donations in October. And many guests have begun leaving thank you letters when they depart.

Two of those who volunteered, our dear friends Elsie and Harold, sold our baked goods at far-flung parishes, freeing me up to race the Community Harvest Benefit 5K with my daughter and son. Harold said that he especially enjoyed meeting all the nice people, many of whom praised the couple for the Catholic Worker's ministry, praise Harold thought should more rightfully go to Claire and me. But I think he was wrong. At this particular time, Claire and I happen to be the frontline of an effort that depends on so many more individuals, folks who never get the direct appreciation they deserve.

For example, a recent donor sent us a gift in lieu of a birthday present for his parents. Another sent packages with blank Christmas cards, toothpaste, and shampoo for our guests. A third, who is in chronic pain, sent us a cheerful letter and check we suspect she could not afford. Each donor gets a hand-written thank you, but these hardly capture the elation I saw on the face of a homeless family on our door step, whom our supporters allowed me to put up in a hotel.

And so, for all of you donors who live too far away to see the fruits of your generosity, here are some excerpts from guests' letters: "I can't thank you enough

S. Jude

for all of your help. It was so beautiful having dinners and praying together. You have such a special home. Thank you for having your home available to help people get on their feet. I am blessed to have met you and had the opportunity to stay here on my journey to a healthier life!" "Thank you for helping me find my way into maturity, and finding myself." "Thank you for giving me a bed to sleep in and some wonderful food to eat."

We even heard recently from a long departed guest: "Thank you for your faithfulness in writing, serving, hoping, and sharing joy. One evening during the winter of 2012, you shared hospitality with me in the form of a warm, free room to rest and sleep, meals, a tour of Worcester, and rides to and from the bus station, to and from a job interview, and to the train station." This woman, now in her third year teaching English as a second language in the Bronx, sent us a donation large enough to pay the December heating bill.

Since everything is a gift from our generous and good God, it is absurd to claim credit for our achievements and even more outrageous to do so when others play major roles in those accomplishments. And so, Claire and I are grateful. We thank you for your selfless support and hope you receive the blessings you rightfully deserve.

Despite its murky origins, I am glad Americans have a holiday devoted to giving thanks. I'm also glad that Christians celebrate God's gratuitous gift of the Incarnation on Christmas. Jesus was not born to lecture, dominate, or berate us, but to demonstrate the depth of divine love. Christmas is the feast of God *with* us, God at our side forever. It is comforting and empowering, as is your support.

May you all enjoy the most blessed Thanksgiving, Advent, Christmas, and New Year! Ω

Scott

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